

LAST PITCH STANDING

COMEDY WRITING FOR PRESENTERS

THE BUILDING BLOCKS OF COMEDY

There have been studies that show most people view public speaking with only slightly less fear than they feel for poisonous snakes.

That's a pretty extreme reaction to doing something that can turn you into a business superstar.

I blame middle school—that's usually when our peers start making fun of us, and many of us never quite recover from the experience.

My advice?

Get over it. You've got lots to say, you've got great ideas—why on earth would you deny us your brilliance?

Besides, if you don't toot your own horn by sharing your ideas, how on earth will we know what brilliance lurks behind your eyes?

Toot your own horn, because no one else even knows where your horn IS!

The first rule of comedy development is this: be PRESENT.

Life is improvisational theater. You can plan, you can strategize, you can prepare.

But when the rubber meets the road, and you're standing before an audience, the only way to sell your message is to be present in the room with the people listening to that message.

Be fresh. Not canned.

Building Block #1: What's your point? What's the topic you're sharing? This is the theme of your bit, and it could be the running theme of your entire presentation. So—what IS your point? What do you want the audience to know? You have to

set this up clearly.

Building Block #2: What information is critical for your audience to have in order to "get it"? "It," in this instance, is the joke—I cannot emphasize how important this is to the success of your humor. If the audience doesn't understand the joke...well, have you ever heard the phrase "lead balloon"?

Building Block #3: What's your attitude? "This is crazy." "You would NOT BELIEVE..." "What is UP with..." Your point, illustrated in a way that gives the audience the information they need to be in on the joke, capped by your attitude, leads to the laugh.

Building Block #4: Action. Don't just say it, BE it. What your au-

ience sees will drive more than 50% of their reaction to your material.

Structure your bits using these building blocks, setting up your jokes with two tight lines that communicate the topic and the in-on-the-joke details, and then nail it with a punch line ending on your punch word. (Google "comedy words" for ideas!)

Then remember to let the audience laugh.

Never waste an opportunity to practice—start weaving your bits into conversations with friends and co-workers. Rehearse without letting anyone know that's what you're doing—they'll just think you're funny as hell.

COMEDY PREMISE CATEGORIES

Here are the most common comedy premise categories—play with them, find the ones that suit your material and your style.

- Absurdity
- Incongruity
- A pox on your rules!
- Comedy blindness (oh, NOW I see...)
- Sudden changes/shifts in persona (king to cabdriver)
- One of these things is NOT like the other
- Scare tactics (Boo!)
- SURPRISE!!
- Over- or under-statement

Try your ideas in a couple of categories, and start working on the bits by using the rehearse-in-conversation gambit above. Find out what works best, and then nail it!

Some great reading:

Improv Wisdom: Don't Prepare, Just Show Up (Patricia Ryan Madson, Random House)

The Complete Idiot's Guide to Comedy Writing (Jim Mendrinos, Penguin)

The Comedy Bible: From Standup to Sitcom (Judy Carter, Fireside)

Comedy Writing Secrets (Mel Helitzer, Writer's Digest)

Remember—start with your knowledge and persona, stir in your understanding of your audience and their world-view, leaven with clarity of purpose, and season with kindness. That's the secret to the perfect comedy cake.

Oh, goody—dessert!!

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ARE YOU TELLING A GREAT STORY?

MAKE 'EM LAUGH, AND YOU'RE LIKEABLE

AND VERY MUCH IN DEMAND!

Making people laugh puts them at ease—when they laugh with you, they're seeing you as someone they'd like to know. Someone they'd like to spend time with.

You make clients laugh, and they'll want to spend time with you, and be happy to pay for the privilege.

In fact, your competitors might start complaining about your unfair business advantage!

People want to do business with people that they like and trust. Building trust is often

tied to the ability to make someone like you enough that they come to trust you.

One of the quickest trips to "I like you!" is shared laughter.

Be aware that shared laughter is brought into being with humor that

- Shares a point of view with the audience
- Hurts NO ONE
- Offends NO ONE
- Makes a point or observation that gives the audience information

they value

Good humor is shared humor. Make sure you know your audience, and speak in their language, about things that they care about.

Be real. Be present. Be kind.

Don't put your reputation on the line by using a bit that crosses a line you won't be able to climb back over.

This is about enhancing your communication & presentation skills, not sinking your career ;)

Comedian, understand thyself.

What I mean there is: understand your perspective, your persona.

If you're known as one of the nicest people in your industry, don't all of a sudden start channeling Don Rickles.

Make your comedy persona congruent with your authentic self.

Successful business humor requires that your audience trusts you, thinks of you as a topic expert.

Use comedy to expand that trust and expertise—if you suddenly change your persona to deliver a bit, you'll only confuse them...and likely blow the pitch.



If you need some help opening up your comedy chakras, I'm here for ya, brothers & sisters.

Sometimes two minds are better than one!